Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

PRESS RELEASE

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BIPARTISAN COALITION OF 37 HOUSE MEMBERS PUSH TO REDUCE DANGEROUS DEPENDENCE ON FOREIGN OIL, URGE STRONGER CAFE STANDARDS

Members Weigh in on NHTSA's Proposed CAFE Restructuring

WASHINGTON, D.C. – In a letter today to Dr. Jeffrey Runge, Administrator of the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA), a bipartisan group of 19 Republican and 18 Democratic House Members, led by **Science Committee Chairman Sherwood Boehlert** (R-NY) and **Representative Ed Markey** (D-MA), a senior Democrat on the House Energy and Commerce Committee, urged NHTSA to "significantly increase fuel economy standards in its upcoming rulemaking process." Noting that the nation's dependence on oil puts America's national security, economy and environment at serious risk, the Members called upon NHTSA to take serious steps to reduce U.S. reliance on foreign oil by aggressively addressing the efficiency of the nation's automotive fleet, which is largest consumer of oil.

The letter was sent in anticipation of NHTSA's upcoming proposal to restructure the way in which Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) standards are calculated. NHTSA is considering fundamental changes to the way in which the CAFE program is structured including basing fuel economy standards on size or weight, rather than having one standard for all light trucks.

In their letter to Dr. Runge, the Members argued that any change in the CAFE program "should significantly increase the overall fuel economy of the fleet and improve safety" regardless of the future mix of vehicles in the fleet. The Members also said that any

restructuring of the program "must not allow overall fuel economy or safety to be undermined," and that "any new program should provide automakers incentives to use technological innovations to improve efficiency and safety."

In addition to Boehlert and Markey, the letter was signed by Representatives **Mark Kirk** (R-IL), **John Lewis** (D-GA), **Todd Platts** (R-PA), **Robert Menendez** (D-NJ), **Wayne Gilchrest** (R-MD), **Mike Castle** (R-DE), **Roscoe Bartlett** (R-MD), **John Olver** (D-MA), **Jim Saxton** (R-NJ), **Anna Eshoo** (D-CA), **Ray LaHood** (R-IL), **Frank Pallone** (D-NJ), **Vernon Ehlers** (R-MI), **Diana DeGette** (D-CO), **Jim Gerlach** (R-PA), **Eliot Engel** (D-NY), **Chris Smith** (R-NJ), **Lois Capps** (D-CA), **Jim Leach** (R-IA), **Tom Allen** (D-ME), **Nancy Johnson** (R-CT), **Hilda Solis** (D-CA), **Chris Shays** (R-CT), **Jay Inslee** (D-WA), **Tim Johnson** (R-IL), **Earl Blumenauer** (D-OR), **Jim Ramstad** (R-MN), **Dennis Cardoza** (D-CA), **Sue Kelly** (R-NY), **Tammy Baldwin** (D-WI), **Frank LoBiondo** (R-NJ), **Curt Weldon** (R-PA), **John Spratt** (D-SC), **George Mille**r (D-CA), and **Jim Davis** (D-FL).

A PDF of the signed letter is attached. The text of the letter follows:

"Dear Dr. Runge:

"Our nation's dependence on oil puts America's national security, economy and environment at serious risk. We must take steps to cut this dangerous dependence. For this reason, we are writing to urge the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration (NHTSA) to significantly increase fuel economy standards in its upcoming rulemaking process.

"As you craft a proposed rule, we would like to advise you of three principles upon which we believe a successful policy must be based. First, any proposed policy should significantly increase the overall fuel economy of the fleet and improve safety. Second, if NHTSA restructures the Corporate Average Fuel Economy (CAFE) program, any change must not allow overall fuel economy or safety to be undermined. Third, any new program should provide automakers incentives to use technological innovations to improve efficiency and safety.

"Principle 1. Increase overall fuel economy and safety

"The biggest single step we can take to reduce America's oil dependence, save consumer money at the gas pump, and curb greenhouse gas emissions is to require all new vehicles to go farther on a gallon of gas. According to the National Academy of Sciences (NAS), at today's gas prices "off-the-shelf" technologies such as more efficient engines and smarter transmissions can safely and economically raise the average fuel economy of America's cars and light trucks to at least 33 miles per gallon. Setting such a standard by 2015 would save 2 million barrels of oil per day by 2020. And even greater fuel savings are possible if NHTSA considers more advanced hybrid technology and high-strength, lightweight materials, two existing technologies that the NAS did not consider in its 2001 report.

"In addition to raising CAFE standards, we urge NHTSA to strengthen the existing program to reap even more fuel savings. We strongly support the agency's consideration of expanding the program to include vehicles up to 10,000 pounds Gross Vehicle Weight Rating.

"Principle 2. Do not allow overall fuel economy or safety to be undermined

"We have serious concerns regarding the agency's consideration of fundamental changes to the structure of the CAFE program, such as basing standards on weight. Such a system could actually result in a fleet of less efficient and more dangerous vehicles if it were to allow automakers to add weight to vehicle designs to qualify them for weaker fuel economy standards. Any incentive to increase vehicle weight could simultaneously erode fuel economy and have adverse implications for safety because it could increase incompatibility in the fleet, making the heaviest vehicles, which are the most damaging in crashes with other cars, even heavier.

"If NHTSA does propose an attribute-based standard, it must either be aggressive enough to prevent a decrease in fuel economy regardless of the future mix of vehicles in the fleet, or contain some other mechanism to prevent backsliding of overall average fuel economy and vehicle safety.

"Principle 3. Encourage technology innovation to improve fuel economy and safety

"Any policy should provide an incentive for automakers to develop and use technology, such as high-strength lightweight materials, to improve fuel economy and safety. These materials, along with hybrids and the technologies identified by the NAS, show great promise for improving fuel economy without reducing safety. As noted earlier, the NAS analysis omitted more advanced hybrid technology which, in a very short time, has moved from "experimental" to "off-the-shelf" to "on-the-road." A successful policy should continue to encourage promising innovation.

"The United States' growing oil dependence, rising gas prices, and increasing greenhouse gas emissions from vehicles put the country at risk. We urge you to increase CAFE standards significantly to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and cut pollution from U. S. vehicles, and to ensure that any reforms to the CAFE system decrease our dependence on oil. We look forward to working with you throughout the rulemaking process."

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